

LASER-WELDED ACTUATOR ASSEMBLY

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates generally to actuator assemblies for use in data storage devices. More particularly, the present invention relates to the manufacture of such assemblies.

Background of the Invention

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Consumer demand for increasingly smaller and lighter portable electronic devices with improved and more reliable data storage capabilities is driving the push for miniaturization of data storage devices. In designing smaller and more robust data storage devices, engineers are
15 faced with many challenges, one of which is the difficulty of assembling movable components. Conventional fasteners or assemblies may add to the thickness or width of the assembly, and thus be a hindrance to further overall size reduction of the data storage device.

Conventional fasteners may be inadequate in another aspect. For
20 example, when the size of the actuator assembly is reduced beyond a certain point, there may be insufficient frictional forces or insufficient area for the fasteners to effect a secure attachment. Therefore, with the miniaturization of data storage devices, there is a need to explore alternative methods of assembly.

25 At the same time, any alternative method of assembly should preferably be amenable to automation so that the final product, be it a data storage device or other consumer electronic device, can be made available to the public at affordable prices. Innovative solutions to such problems are required.

In addition to providing a solution that overcomes these and other problems, the present invention also offers further advantages over conventional assemblies.

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Summary of the Invention

The present invention relates to the assembly of actuator assemblies for use in data storage devices such as disc drives.

10 In accordance with embodiments of the invention, rotatable portions of an actuator assembly are metallurgically bonded together, for example by using lasers to form at least one spot-weld. The rotatable portions may include an actuator arm, a voice coil support, and the rotatable part of a pivot mechanism. Embodiments of the present invention may further provide for contact between the actuator beam and the rotatable part of the
15 pivot mechanism. Preferably, contact is provided between at least a part of the actuator beam and at least one transverse extension from the rotatable part of the pivot mechanism.

Some embodiments involve welding an actuator beam to a rotatable part of the pivot mechanism, where the actuator beam is a monolithic
20 structure having the actuator arm and the voice coil support. During assembly, components of the actuator assembly are preferably introduced to the place of assembly from generally the same direction as the laser.

These and various other features as well as advantages which characterize the present invention will be apparent upon reading of the
25 following detailed description and review of the associated drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a top view of a disc drive.

FIG. 2 is an exploded view showing an actuator assembly of one
5 embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a schematic cross-sectional view of the actuator assembly of
FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 is a perspective view according to another embodiment of the
present invention.

10 **FIG. 5** shows another embodiment of the present invention.

Detailed Description

FIG. 1 shows a top view of a disc drive **100**, with part of its housing
15 **101** removed to reveal the components mounted within. The housing **101**
may include a base deck **102**. Not shown is a printed circuit board
assembly that is attached to the other side of the base deck **102**.

Rotatably mounted to the base deck **102** is a disc stack assembly **110**
made up of a disc **112** that is secured to a spindle motor by a disc clamp
20 **114**. The disc stack assembly **110** may be located in a cavity formed by the
base deck **102** so that the disc stack assembly is at least partially
surrounded by a shroud **116** extending transversely alongside the edge of
the disc **112**. When the disc stack assembly **110** rotates, air or fluid near the
disc stack assembly is dragged into motion along with the rotating disc **112**.
25 A filter **118** may be positioned adjacent the disc stack assembly **110** to trap
contaminants in the moving air or fluid, thereby helping to maintain a
clean environment within the housing **101**.

At least one of the major surfaces of the disc **112** is formatted for
storing data. Data is written to and read from one or more tracks on a disc
30 surface by read/write heads **120**. The read/write heads **120** may be part of

a head gimbal assembly **122** that is suspended from one end of a suspension **124**, which is in turn attached to a pivotably mounted actuator arm **204**. In addition to other functions, the actuator arm **204** serves as a framework for supporting wiring **126** (which may be in the form of a printed circuit cable) that runs from the head gimbal assembly **122** to a connector or bracket **128**, from where it communicates with the printed circuit board assembly. A pre-amplifier **119** or other integrated-circuit chips may be located on the actuator assembly **126** to provide improved signal transmission.

10 In the present context, an actuator assembly **200** refers to an assembly that includes an actuator arm **204**, a rotator **310**, and a movable part **206** of a voice coil motor **130** that sets the actuator arm **204** in motion. The rotator **310** is a rotatable part of a pivot mechanism **310** for enabling rotational movement of the actuator arm **204**. The movable part **206** of the voice coil motor **130** may be a voice coil support **206** to which a voice coil **136** is attached. The voice coil motor **130** further includes a permanent magnet **132** and a configuration of one or more poles **134** designed to close the magnetic flux from the magnet **132**. By controlling the current to the voice coil **136** of the voice coil motor **130**, the actuator arm **204** can be used to position the read/write heads **120** at a desired track when data is being read from or written to the track, or to move the read/write heads **120** to a new track location.

The actuator assembly **200** may be limited in its range of movement by suitable placement of limit stops or latches **138**.

25 Turning to **FIG. 2** for a further description of the actuator assembly **200**, the actuator arm **204** and the voice coil support **206** are shown as being part of a monolithic actuator beam **202**. The actuator beam **202** may define an aperture **208** that is shaped for receiving the pivot mechanism **300**.

One part of the actuator beam **202** that extends away from the aperture **208** serves as an actuator arm **204**. The distal end of the actuator

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arm **204** provides for attachment to a suspension **124** that can support a head gimbal assembly **122** (Fig. 1). Another part of the actuator beam **202** extends away from the aperture **208** to serve as a voice coil support **206**. The voice coil support **206** may be in the form of two spaced-apart
5 extensions suitably sized to receive the voice coil **136** between the extensions. The distal ends of the extensions **206** may be configured to form part of a limit stop or a latch **138** (FIG. 1) so as to provide some limitation to the range of movement of the actuator assembly **200** or to immobilize the actuator assembly **200** when the disc drive **100** is not in operation. The
10 actuator arm **204** and the voice coil support **206** may extend away from the aperture **208** in generally opposite directions.

The pivot mechanism **300** can be one in which the rotator **310** is in engagement with a stationary portion **318** via a set of bearings **316** (FIG. 3). The stationary portion **318** may be in the form of a shaft that is mountable
15 to the base deck **102** to provide for rotational movement of the rotator **310** (and accordingly, the actuator arm **204**) relative to the base deck **102** about an axis of rotation **210**. The axis of rotation **210** is taken to define an axial direction. It will also be understood that the pivot mechanism **300** may not be one that operates on bearings since other forms of pivot mechanisms can
20 provide the same functionality of enabling rotational movement of the actuator assembly **200**.

The rotator **310** of the pivot mechanism **300** includes a sleeve **312**. The sleeve **312** is generally oriented along the axial direction **210**. The sleeve **312** may be in the form of a hollow cylinder coupled on the inside to
25 the bearings **316**. A flange **314** extends radially outward from one edge of the sleeve **312**, to provide at least one abutment surface **316** that is transverse to the axial direction **210**. The abutment surface **316** is configured for abutment with at least part of the actuator beam **202**. The abutment surface **316** may extend continuously along the circumference of

the sleeve 312. Alternatively, the flange 314 may not be continuous throughout the circumference of the sleeve 312.

During the assembly process, the rotator 310 of the pivot mechanism 300 is assembled to the actuator beam 202 by fitting the sleeve 312 through
5 the aperture 208 until the actuator beam 202 abuts the abutment surface 316 of the flange 314. As illustrated in FIG. 2, this step involves relative movement of the sleeve 312 and the actuator beam 202 along the axial direction 210. Next, the actuator beam 202 and the rotator 310 are laser welded together. In particular, spot welds 404, 406 can be formed at the
10 interface between the rotator 310 and the actuator beam 202. Thus, the laser welds may be formed between the flange 314 and the actuator beam 202, or the welds 406 may be formed between the sleeve 312 and the actuator beam 202. In both cases, the actuator assembly 200 is held together by direct metallurgical bonds between the actuator arm 204 and the pivot
15 mechanism 300, as illustrated in FIG. 3.

FIG. 3 further shows an example where a laser welding apparatus 400 is configured to direct a laser 402 in a direction substantially parallel to the axial direction 210. Such a configuration is designed for manufacturability because the pre-assembled components and the laser can
20 be introduced to the assembly from the same direction. Accordingly, fewer points of access need to be provided on the assembly line, thus facilitating automation for volume manufacture. This is another advantage over conventional assemblies where more access points would have been required to attach or tighten fasteners.

25 It is contemplated that the laser 400 may alternatively be directed from a direction that is at an angle to the axial direction 210, or it can be directed from a direction opposite to that shown in FIG. 3. Different embodiments of the present invention can therefore be deployed according to the physical constraints of the manufacturing environment without
30 going beyond the scope of the invention.

It can be seen from the description above that, not only does the resultant actuator assembly 200 require fewer steps to assemble, fewer components will actually be required. Manufacture of the actuator assembly 200 is also simpler than conventional processes because no
5 additional clamping or fastening processes are required. Overall, this can lead to improved manufacturing efficiencies and lower costs.

Furthermore, embodiments of the present invention are particularly suited for making miniature actuator assemblies where the amount of friction between very small interface areas may be insufficient for effecting
10 a secure joint using other methods.

FIG. 4 shows an alternative embodiment where the actuator beam 202 is not configured to have the same elevation throughout its length. In this example, a step 220 is provided between the actuator arm 204 and the voice coil support 206 of the actuator beam 202. In assembly, the voice coil
15 support 206 and the actuator arm 204 may be at different elevations to optimize space utilization within the housing 101.

It is proposed that two spaced-apart laser welds 404, 404' are formed, although the number of laser welds may be varied. By varying the size of the welds and the number of welds, the integrity of the assembly
20 can be controlled. Material choice for the actuator beam 202 and the rotator 310 is not constrained by the method of assembly because laser welding can be used to effectively join together both similar and dissimilar materials.

FIG. 5 shows an alternative embodiment where more than one
25 actuator beam is attached to the rotator 310. The flange 314 is spaced away from both ends of the sleeve 312 and provides for abutment on both of its major surfaces with actuator beams 202, 202'. Laser welds 404, 404' can be formed where there is abutment between the rotatable part 310 and the actuator beams 202, 202'. One of the actuator beams 202' may include only
30 an aperture 208' for engagement with the sleeve 312 and an actuator arm

204' for supporting the head gimbal assembly. Another actuator beam 202 may include an aperture 208 for engagement with the sleeve 312, an actuator arm 204 for supporting the head gimbal assembly, and a voice coil support 206 that forms part of the voice coil motor. In such embodiments, 5 direct welding of the actuator beams 202, 202' to the rotator 310 again provide advantages over conventional assemblies, for example, improved manufacturability and decreased space requirement.

It is to be understood that even though numerous characteristics and advantages of various embodiments of the present invention have been set 10 forth in the foregoing description, together with details of the structure and function of various embodiments of the invention, this disclosure is illustrative only, and changes may be made in detail, especially in matters of structure and arrangement of parts within the principles of the present invention to the full extent indicated by the broad general meaning of the 15 terms in which the appended claims are expressed.